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Response to Naomi Hodgson: The Will to Change and Morality

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I consider two points of Naomi Hodgson's paper that I am interested in. First, the willingness to listen and second, morality. I will discuss the willingness to listen and morality, and ask two questions.

DISCUSSION ABOUT WILLINGNESS TO LISTEN

I am very interested in the idea of face-to-face contact and the willingness to listen. This is found, for example, in the phrase, 'No change (education) will occur without the willingness to be so' (Hodgson, 2009). It means that the relation between self and the other, or face-to-face relations, cannot be equal if there is not the willingness to listen.

I have two reasons for being interested in this. First, the acknowledgement of the willingness to listen is not the denial of the activity. The willingness to listen does not suggest the superiority of passivity over activity, but a better relationship between the passivity and the activity. The idea of a Europe of Knowledge, for example, requires European citizens to be entrepreneurs who are active, and passivity is not considered. The reference to the willingness to listen, however, points to the importance of passivity and warns against the ideal of the European citizen as an entrepreneurial self.

Second, the willingness to listen shows the importance of human relationships, the face-to-face relation between self and the other. Therefore it can be seen as a resistance to the tendency toward a form of totalitarianism. Totalitarianism requires a stable economy as its basis, but as Hodgson suggests in her paper, an economy is originally not a stable entity. It occurs in the face-to-face relation between self and the other.

DISCUSSION ABOUT MORALITY

The second aspect of the paper I will discuss is morality. In Hodgson's paper, Plato's image of 'a path upward' and a universal moral compass, as an understanding of education, are denied. Instead, 'a gleam of light over an inner landscape' becomes the indication of how to progress. Moreover, the gleam of light is related to our everyday language, so the judgment, the act of deciding the direction, happens there. Judgment occurs within the everyday situation and, therefore, each everyday event has moral aspects or is the object of moral judgment.

I am very interested in the idea of morality in Emersonian moral perfectionism presented by Hodgson because of the close relation between the every day and ‘a gleam of light over an inner landscape’ (Hodgson, 2009). The everyday language, or reality, is full of contingency as mentioned in her paper. The contingency of the relation between self and other appears to the self as a gleam of light. That is, a gleam of light over an inner landscape is perceived contingently. Moreover, a gleam of light becomes the indication of direction, so it can be what is judged. It means, as mentioned above, the judgment made in response to the everyday fact or event is related to morality.

I have referred to two aspects of Hodgson’s paper, the willingness to listen and morality. I now want to ask two questions about these aspects. First, I question the idea of willingness.

QUESTION ON WILLINGNESS

As mentioned above, I also give a great importance to the willingness to listen, to passivity. It is true that no interaction and no education can occur without it, and no relation between self and other is constructed, because without it the face-to-face contact cannot be made. For example, if you ignore me or don’t notice me when I speak to you, you don’t have any willingness to listen. To talk and have an exchange with someone, the willingness to listen and a face-to-face relation is required.

Although I support the idea of the acknowledgement of willingness to listen and its importance, I wish to question the use of the words, ‘the willingness’. I wish to ask how we might think about the idea of ‘the willingness to *change*’?

In Hodgson’s paper, the activity and passivity are explained as ‘a constant willingness to question and be questioned’. The latter, passivity, is also expressed in other words, ‘the willingness to listen’ and ‘willingness to be changed’. Therefore the former, or the activity, can also be expressed in other words, that is ‘the willingness to *change*’. I suggest therefore that by ‘willingness to be changed’ Hodgson means ‘not afraid of being changed.’ Does this imply that ‘willingness to change’ means ‘not afraid of changing’? I don’t think ‘*the willingness to change*’ is enough. It is true that the willingness to be changed is required in the relation between self and other on which citizenship is based, but I don’t think the idea of ‘willingness’ is sufficient for the idea of the activity, especially in the context of her discussion about citizenship. In my view, action and activity are also crucial components of citizenship: it requires a more positive mode of engagement with the other than the attitude of ‘willingness’.

I also think that the willingness to change is not enough in terms of time. Which comes first, the activity (or questioning) or the passivity (or being questioned)? The answer is obviously the activity, because when the other is questioned, it is after one questions the other. Unless one intends to question an interaction itself can’t exist. The act of questioning comes first: the moment of being questioned follows, and then an interaction, or the relation between self and the other, takes place.

This means that when one questions, ‘the *will* to question’ is required. When one is questioned, on the other hand, one can reply to it without ‘the will to be questioned’ because all one has to do is to reply after being questioned. One is only required to have ‘the willingness to listen’. This is the crucial difference between active and passive.

The citizenship in Hodgson's paper, which is related to economy, is based on the face-to-face relation and the interaction. It consists of the relation to question and be questioned, that is, in other words, 'the *will* to change' and 'the *willingness* to be changed'. 'The willingness to change' sounds to be too timid as an attitude to the other in a face-to-face relationship. What is required in the interaction between self and the other is, in brief, the *interest* in an other's words, that is, a more active mode of commitment. Even if you are indifferent to someone, you can still be willing to change. I think that a face-to-face relation, or an interaction, requires both the will to change the other and the willingness to listen to the other, the interactive mode of action and passion.

QUESTIONS ON MORALITY

The second question is a more radical question: What is the idea of morality in her paper based on? What is called 'morality' in Hodgson's paper is based on Cavell's Emersonian concept of self: 'an unattained but attainable self' (Cavell, 2004, p. 247). It is true that morality is explained as something unstable and vague and affected by contingency, but if it is completely unstable, it makes no sense to use the word 'moral'. Morality is not defined by a clear measure, but it seems certain that there is morality. What is it that qualifies morality?

I think it is a very difficult issue, so I will discuss it with reference to Kitaro Nishida's *An Inquiry into the Good* (*Zen no Kenkyu*). He says: 'It can be said that the good is self-realization' (Nishida, 1990, p. 192). Self-realization means one realizes one's ideal. This implies that each has his or her own ideal and they cannot be the same. From his point of view, the problem of good and evil, or that of morality, manifests and is resolved in each person. It also means the idea of the good can change, because one's ideal can change. This seems similar to the understanding of morality found in Hodgson's paper, because both Nishida's good and morality in her paper are affected by contingency. They are both changeable.

However, even if good and evil necessarily vary from person to person, certainly there is a sense of *the* good in Nishida's thought. He says: 'The good is the beauty' (p. 193), and 'The concept of the good is consistent with that of being' (ibid.). The ideal, the beauty, or the being is what one's self is to aim at, that is, something similar to Plato's light, or *Idea*. In Nishida's thought, the goal, or the ideal exists even though the ideal can change. In this sense, it can be said that *the* good in his thought exists on 'a path upward.'

Now I return to the subject of morality in her paper. If denying 'a path upward', then what exists as the source of morality? Would she say that there is no such source? This is my question about morality in Hodgson's argument about Cavell's Emersonian moral perfectionism.

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